

# Old Palace Alumnae News

## Welcome



I hope this brief edition of the Autumn/Winter OPA News finds you well and the future events published are ones that we can all look forward to.

This summer, the OPA held an Associate Alumnae Afternoon for Years 7 and 8 and we also hosted a very small Coffee Morning instead of our usual Annual

Summer Reunion. Both were lovely occasions blessed by good weather and held outside in the sunshine. My thanks go to Dr Tanya Knowles, Maureen Bunn and Hilary Gadd for their thoroughly engaging school day recollections and to all those OPA's who attended the Coffee Morning, it was lovely to see you all.

We are actively looking for a new OPA Newsletter Editor as Katy Beck has resigned following her relocation to Glasgow. Katy has been a wonderful OPA Newsletter Editor and produced excellent newsletters over the past few years. They have been appreciated by us all and more importantly keep the OPA Community connected and this has been especially

pertinent throughout what has been an extremely difficult past 18 months of the Covid 19 pandemic. My grateful thanks go to Katy for her hard work, time and dedication given to her role as OPA Newsletter Editor and we wish Katy our very best wishes in her new position.

Joanna Shirley our OPA Secretary, has resigned and stepped down from our OPA Committee. Joanna has been a wonderful support to our committee for many years and my grateful thanks go to her for all her hard work and 'Minute' taking especially, which I will miss. My best wishes go to Joanna and her family for the future.

I would like to think that we have turned a corner this Autumn and things will start to look a little brighter and we can allow ourselves a little optimism for the future. I am looking forward to our forthcoming Carol Service in December and our Reunion Dinner scheduled for Saturday 19th March 2022.

Finally, I would like to thank Jane Burton, Nicola Berry and the School for their continued support for the OPA.

Katherine Homatas

Chair OPA

## Connecting our Alumnae Network



I am delighted to announce that the OPA is embracing social media with several new ways to connect with our talented, global alumnae community via LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. All you need to do is search for 'OPJWS Alumnae'. There are already over 250 in our LinkedIn and Instagram communities which is very exciting.

Our aim is to make it easier and faster to connect, and as I have recently posted, it is always lovely to hear your news – whether that be celebrating successes, sharing adventures or overcoming challenges.

Now, you can either contact us directly via email [OPALumnae@oldpalace.croydon.sch.uk](mailto:OPALumnae@oldpalace.croydon.sch.uk), or via social media.

Connecting our alumnae network is a really important part of our vision for Old Palace, as we strive to enable the new generation to become confident, capable and connected individuals, who are well positioned for a successful and meaningful future.

We also hope through these improved connections to invite alumnae to work with our students. Your experiences can be both inspiring and invaluable as students begin their higher education and career journeys. I am delighted to announce that we are hosting our first Alumnae Careers Networking

event on 22nd March 2022. We are seeking alumnae to participate in panel discussions with upper school students as part of our careers week programme. If you would like to participate do please contact us via email or through our social media pages. We look forward to hearing from you all

Helen Richards

Assistant Head: Co-curricular,  
Community and Partnerships

# Year 7 & 8: OPA Associate Alumnae Afternoon

After a very long wait (the original event was postponed from March 2020!) we were delighted to be able to hold the OPA Associate Alumnae Afternoon on the 2nd July. The Medieval Garden provided a safe, outside space for Year 7 followed by Year 8 to hear wonderful stories from members of our Old Palace community about their time at school.

Our thanks go to Katherine Homatas (Chair of the OPA), Hilary Gadd, Maureen Bunn (ex Chair of the OPA) and our very own Dr Tanya Knowles, who had to repeat their stories four times to ensure the year groups stayed in their Covid-safe bubbles.

After each session, the students were delighted to receive an Associate Alumnae badge, a drink and a muffin.



# Fiona McNevin

Old Palace alumnae, Fiona McNevin, left in 2018 with a place to study French and Latin at St. Andrews University in Scotland. In September, as part of her course, she flew to Russia to study at the Yaroslavl State University. Fiona has kindly offered to provide a regular update on her experience of studying in this fascinating country. Here she writes about her first month:



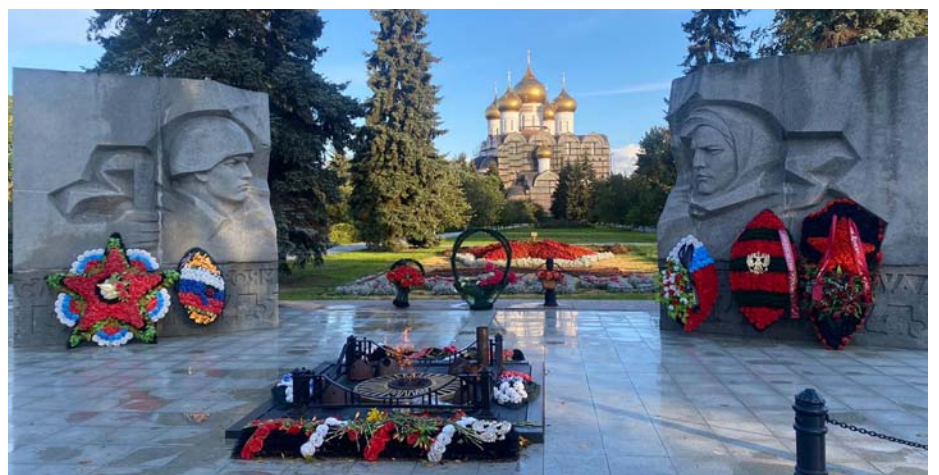
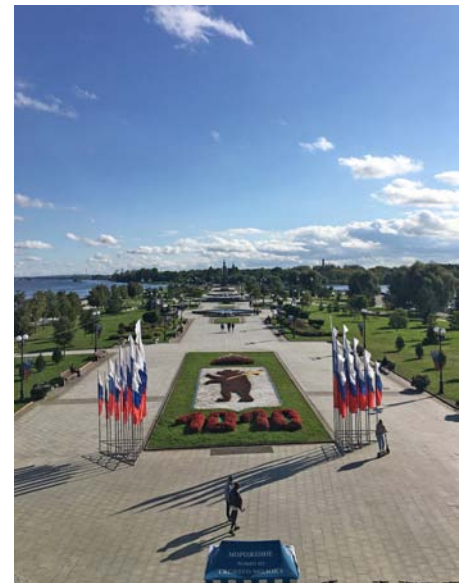
Languages was a passion of mine that Old Palace not only encouraged but celebrated – I was provided with numerous opportunities to challenge myself such as taking four language GCSEs in Year 11 and studying Russian GCSE alongside my A-Levels. I am still beyond grateful that I was able to explore language-learning in such a supportive environment, and I know I wouldn't be where I am today without the school's encouragement. I also have a huge amount to thank the University of St Andrews for. The flexibility of their degree programmes meant I arrived studying French & Latin, with Russian as my chosen third subject (all students study three subjects in first and second year) but switched my degree in Semester 2 of first year to French & Russian, after becoming so enthused by the Russian department at university.

Studying languages had been my dream for a long time, and the thrill of a study abroad opportunity played a huge role in my motivation to make sure I achieved my goals. Fast-forward through GCSEs, A-Levels, and countless essays and exams at university (not to mention a pandemic), and I've made it! I flew to Russia on the 1st September and I can safely say that all the hard work and effort has been worth it.

I am currently living in Yaroslavl, a beautiful historic city situated where the Volga and Kotorosl rivers meet, around 250km north-east of Moscow. I am living in an apartment with a host for total immersion, a lovely Russian lady called Anna Borisovna. Along with two other students from St Andrews, I study at Yaroslavl State University Monday- Friday for four hours on an intensive course designed to fully engage us in the language and culture here in Russia.

The past month has been absolutely incredible. Despite the pre-departure nerves and the year's delay, I am enjoying myself to the full and

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## Fiona McNevin *continued*

experiencing as much as I can of what Russia has to offer. I have visited countless beautiful churches with their unique onion dome architecture and gleaming golden interiors, a number of hidden gem museums in Yaroslavl such as the museum of Music and Time which was full of unusual collections of bells, gramophones, clocks and irons (why not?!) and a fascinating working elk farm in Kostroma, a nearby city. I've watched a Chekhov play, supported the local team at an ice hockey match and I am also attending choir twice a week where we sing a range of songs all completely in Russian. It was tough to start with but with the help of some lovely Russian students I seem to have

grasped the necessary vocabulary to fully understand a rehearsal! We are currently practicing for a concert in Moscow in late November, and I'm hoping we will sing some carols soon.

Every day brings new experiences and I am so grateful to be living and learning in Russia. Whatever you choose to study, I would recommend looking at the study abroad programmes at your chosen university – it's an opportunity not to be missed.

Fiona McNevin

(2018)

## Old Palace Community Christmas lunch: Tuesday 21st December

We are organising a Christmas lunch for people in our local community who may be lonely over the Christmas period. The event is being organised with Croydon Minster. We will be hosting lunch for 150 people from the Croydon almshouses and care homes, because of the difficulties that elderly and isolated people have experienced over the last 18 months

£7.50 buys a 3 course lunch for one. If you would like to donate,

[Click here](#) if you would like to donate

# In Memory of Jean Smith née Clayton

In the autumn 2020 edition of the OPA News, Maureen Bunn wrote of a "lifetime of friendship" in which she referred to her first day at school and being placed near "the lovely Miss Clayton".

It so happened that although a pupil of Miss Clayton for my last two years at school, I enjoyed a lifetime of friendship with her. This came about through our mutual love of classical music rather than literature. (Jean had wanted to study music at university but her father forbade it). Perhaps those of you who knew her at school may like to know a little more about the rest of her life.

After leaving OP, Jean returned home (Harrow) and taught in a local school. She met Edward Smith through their local church, they married and went on to have three children: first a boy followed by two girls. Very sadly and unexpectedly, Edward died from a heart attack when still quite young. At that time they lived in Ashted, Surrey but Jean soon moved, together with her mother, into a beautiful bungalow in Liphook to be near her elder daughter, Katherine. Jean had always taken her religion very seriously and soon got involved with a local prayer group.

After several years, Jean's mother died, by which time Katherine's family had

moved to Buckinghamshire. There were difficult times brewing for them and Jean felt she wanted to be nearer to support Katherine, so she bought another bungalow nearby. Because of the geographical distance, I seldom saw Jean, but we kept in touch by letter. During this time, Jean felt moved to join the Order of St. Francis which entailed living by the rules of that Order.

In 2017 Jean suffered a severe stroke which left her almost totally paralysed and wheelchair-bound. Her speech was far from easy to understand but I phoned her every month until she died in September 2018. Sadly, I had not been able to visit her or attend her funeral due to my own position as a full time carer.

I planted Michaelmas daisies in my garden in her memory and as a reminder of where it all began: dear Old Palace!

Sheila Baker

(1943-1950)



## Cecilia Mollie Louise Langford

1930-2021

When I saw the advertisement for a job at Old Palace, it seemed a good omen and I applied straight away. A good omen because my aunt, Mollie Langford, taught English here in the early sixties.

The Sisters of the Church were still running the school when Mollie was here. The staff room was in what is now the Ayckbowm Room. The whole school could fit into Chapel, and in those days you had to wear a hat for services. Mollie remembered running through the Guard Room to get to Chapel, cramming on the beret that she kept ready in her pocket. Mollie was here when the Queen paid her first visit to the school. (I was here for the second!)

She didn't stay at Old Palace long: when I was born, she moved back to Hastings to be near my mother. She got a post at Beresford Houses, a girls' independent boarding school in Eastbourne. She spent the rest of her career there, rising to Head of English and eventually Deputy Head. When she retired, she looked after her parents until they died. She and my mother later moved to Scotland to be near my brother. When he and his family emigrated to Australia about ten years ago, Mollie and Mother moved to Derbyshire.

Sadly, Mollie suffered from dementia in the last few years, and eventually had to move into a care home. She was then diagnosed with cancer, but proved remarkably resilient: the suggested "weeks or months" turned out to be over a year. The Covid lockdowns sadly meant very limited visits, but she died peacefully at the care home in March.

Over the years, I have met a few people she taught and have heard that she was a very good teacher. She certainly fostered in me and my siblings a great love of reading and learning. I cannot imagine a more wonderful aunt: we all miss her very much.

**Miss S Funnell**  
Head of Year 8

## Mary Tooke

(née Van Gyseghem) 1930-36

Mary's daughter has informed us that her mother and OP alumnae (1930-36), Mary Tooke (née Van Gyseghem), passed away peacefully on 27th August 2021. She was 101 years old!



## Eileen Mary Durrant

1938-43

Eileen's daughter, Ann Russell writes: My mother, Eileen Mary Durrant, sadly passed away on 18th April 2021 in East Surrey Hospital. She was aged 94 years and leaves her loving husband George (they were married for 67 years). She also leaves two daughters: Jill and Ann; grandchildren Claire, David, Joanne, Nicholas, Alex and Charlotte and great grandchildren Elsbeth and Alara.

She attended Old Palace from 1938 to 1943. She loved her school years and never stopped talking fondly of her time there. The nuns had a big influence on her and she kept her bible and prayer books they gave her.

She was evacuated to Eastbourne in 1939. She was given a gas mask and the children were paraded at Eastbourne train station. They were given biscuits and emergency rations. Local people came to a hall and were given rations for the children. Then volunteers took any remaining children to houses – knocking on doors to see who would have them.

Eileen was taken in by a lady who ran a guesthouse. The teachers from Old Palace School accompanied the children and slots at a local college were arranged, so they could continue their studies. Eileen was only there three months until December 1939, as the bombing that was expected didn't happen. This was ironic as she was sent back home to Thornton Heath when in Spring of 1940 the blitz bombing started.

She talked so fondly of her time there and I know how much the nuns and School really shaped her life. She felt very blessed to have won a scholarship to enable her to attend this wonderful School.

## Julie Chapman

(née Ray) 1962 - 69

It is with a very heavy heart that I have to inform you that after a long illness Julie passed away last Saturday.

She had T Cell Lymphoma which we all thought had gone away but the chemo drugs gave her cardio myopathy and then the Lymphoma came back.

She had spent many weeks in hospital during the last 18 months but, having contracted Sepsis for the second time, suffered a cardiac arrest during the night. Although they managed to revive her, sadly she passed away the following day surrounded by Colin and her two sons.

# 60th Reunion - Class of 1961



Despite a petrol crisis, Covid etc, four of us managed to get together on St Michael's Day 2021 to celebrate 60 years of friendship and to raise a glass to many more.

Left to right: Avril Sleeman (née Pizey), Heather Lovegrove (née Arnold), Astrid Richardson (née Dunton) and Sue Bettle.

## Sue Bettle

(1961- 1968)

**Old Palace of John Whitgift School**  
Independent Girls' School

**Croydon Minster**

**Old Palace Community Christmas Lunch**  
Tuesday 21st December: 11:00am-3:00pm

Old Palace (together with Croydon Minster) is hosting a lunch for people who may be lonely at Christmas.

**Can you help?** A donation of just £7.50 will provide a 3 course lunch for 1 person.

[www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/oldpalacecommunitychristmaslunch?utm\\_term=2vMxZ5vmw](https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/oldpalacecommunitychristmaslunch?utm_term=2vMxZ5vmw)

part of the **john whitgift foundation**

**Old Palace Alumnae**

**OPA & Friends Carol Service**  
**Monday 6 December 2021**  
Old Palace Senior School  
6pm: The Banqueting Hall  
7pm: Mulled Wine & Mince Pies

RSVP: [OPAlumnae@oldpalace.croydon.sch.uk](mailto:OPAlumnae@oldpalace.croydon.sch.uk)

**Mask up if you are aged 11+**

## Dates for the Diary

### OPA & Friends Carol Service

Monday, 6th December 2021

6pm Banqueting Hall

7pm: Mulled Wine and Mince Pies

We are looking forward to welcoming our alumnae, their families and friends to the OPA & Friends Carol Service next Monday at 6.00pm.

To keep everyone safe, we've decided to move the Service to the Banqueting Hall.

We are asking guests to take a lateral flow test if possible and everyone over the age of 11 will be required to wear a mask, but our wonderful choir will still be singing and there will be mince pies and mulled wine afterwards.

Do join us (no ticket/booking required).

### Reunion Dinner 2022

7pm 19th March 2022

Further details will be posted on the OPA website:

[www.oldpalace.croydon.sch.uk/opa/](http://www.oldpalace.croydon.sch.uk/opa/)

### Alumnae Careers Networking Event

22nd March 2022

### Summer Reunion 2022

25th June 2022

More details on our website.

### Friends of Old Palace

Keep an eye on their website for further details.

[www.friendsofoldpalace.org](http://www.friendsofoldpalace.org)